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University of Kansas

Child welfare in war time

Lawrence, Kansas

[1918?]

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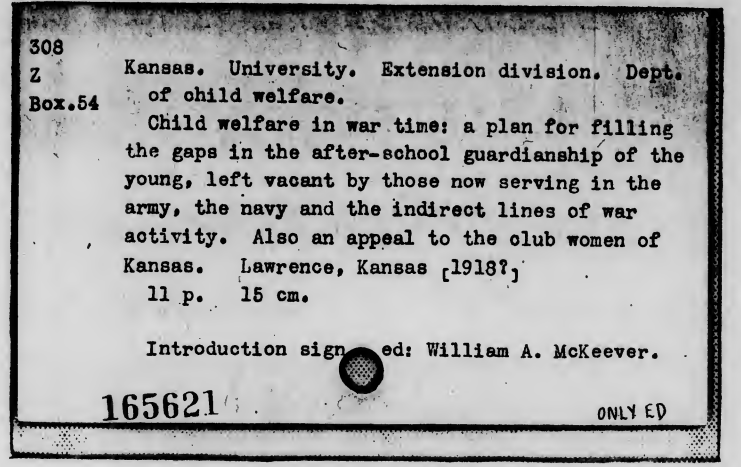

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Kansas. University. Extension division. Dept. of child welfare.
Child welfare in war time: a plan for filling the gaps in the after-school guardianship of the young, left vacant by those now serving in the army, the navy and the indirect lines of war activity. Also an appeal to the club women of Kansas. Lawrence, Kansas [1918?]
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Introduction signed: William A. McKeever.

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UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DIVISION
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Child Welfare in War Time

A plan for filling the gaps in the after-school guardianship of the young, left vacant by those now serving in the army, the navy and the indirect lines of war activity.

Also

An appeal to the club women of Kansas.

Address all communications to
DEPARTMENT OF CHILD WELFARE,
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DIVISION,
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS,
LAWRENCE, KANSAS

7-4218

A Disturbing Situation.

By WILLIAM A. MCKEEVER.

As an indirect consequence of the great world war the children and young people of the nation are now threatened with delinquency, dependency, and other forms of ill conduct as never before during the present century. The club women of Kansas are hereby urged to suspend their purely social, recreational, and other light pastime activities and to devote the time thus saved to the pressing needs of the young. Indeed, every such woman should be considered as an associate member of the local Council of Defense and authorized to act at once with the Committee on Civilian Relief, and otherwise, in order to stem the receding tide of juvenile welfare.

The moral welfare of the young in European countries suffered an alarming backset during the first two or three years after their entrance into the war. We must act promptly and vigorously or the same serious condition will soon be upon us. Especially in the ways itemized below are the characters of our growing boys and girls being subjected to the most severe strain ever known to our time. The remarkable achievements of the national government in building up the health, the morals, and the spiritual integrity of the enlisted men stands out in sharp contrast to our failure to deal thus constructively with the boys and girls at home.

So every club woman of Kansas is asked to take this matter personally to heart, to inquire critically into the local situation, and to lend a hand wherever possible to the very trying task of taking adequate care of our juvenile population during the strain of the great war.

I. Help the Home.

Many thousands of the fathers, older brothers, and other male relatives—each in some respects the chief guardian and moral adviser of the children at home—have hurried away to the army and left the worried mother to struggle as best she can with the problem of discipline. To relieve this situation, assist the Home Service Department of the Red Cross in ways like the following:

1. Secure a list of all local homes of departed soldiers wherein there are children left behind.

2. Appoint a committee to call systematically at these homes, and there offer child-welfare counsel and advice, as well as make a list of needs of further service.

3. Go fully prepared to build up the morale of the home visited, to consider the health conditions of the mother and children, to assist in bettering the economic situation of all, to help solve the problems of moral discipline, and the like.

4. Through previous publicity and otherwise, separate your home visiting from all suggestion of charity or almsgiving. Arm yourselves with as much official authority as possible, and call at all homes of the class alike, as gatherers of statistics, as distributors of government information, as counsellors of help and guidance.

5. Be prepared to distribute brief literature on child life and to give references covering any specific problem as the occasion may arise. Do not forget that any ill condition in the life of the children may be but a consequence of a disturbed and unbalanced life in the mother. By assisting in the reorganization of her conduct and thinking, you may often find the best solution of the problems of her children.

II. Safeguard Child Labor.

Many thousands of boys and girls barely old enough to escape compulsory school attendance are employed in the various industries. Under these emergency conditions they often come and go without adequate counsel as to the use of their leisure time and their money. Also, there always is danger that these children become merely cheap laborers and not well-rounded citizens.

1. By checking over the school census reports with the school enrollment, you may obtain the name of every minor employed out of school. Examine the list and give special attention to all questionable cases.

2. Inquire into the physical welfare of these young wage-earners. Some will be found working under sweatshop conditions or will be otherwise mistreated by their employers.

3. Know definitely the economic situation of these young people. Are they paid a reasonable wage? Do they carry their money home or squander it? Have they been presented with a practical plan of saving and thrift?

4. Seek to remedy the moral and spiritual welfare of the young industrialists. Request the employer to look sharply after the moral atmosphere surrounding his place. Provide means and incentives for these young persons to participate in clean social and recreational affairs, to attend church service, and the like.

5. Whenever possible induce young employees to attend night school, to take a regular reading course, to frequent the public library, and to keep in touch with current events. Make your guidance here very definite and concrete.

III. Cooperate with the School.

A very large number of the ablest teachers, principals, and superintendents have been drawn away from the school and their places filled by those ill prepared to do the work. Both instruction and discipline are suffering and an alarming demoralization of the pupils is apparent in some places. You can assist as follows:

1. Have a subcommittee to visit the school and to coöperate with the work thereof, especially in matters of extending the school service into the community.

2. Seek to keep alive the school patrons' society, the parent-teacher association or any other form of club activity which will tend to bring patrons into close touch with the school and the other local agencies for juvenile guidance. An informal parenthood is one of our greatest welfare problems.

3. Appeal to the school authorities to supervise the play of the children at recess periods, to take over the direction of the boy scouts, the girl scouts and other movements intended for boy and girl guidance.

4. Induce the school officials to provide weekly for the social entertainment of adolescents, both those within the school and those employed elsewhere, and to make this a regular part of the curriculum.

5. Many of the teachers seem to conduct the pupil's war service in the school without a definite plan. In some cases there has been much confusion and also much complaint of too close confinement. The committee of patrons should obtain from the Bureau of Education and the Treasury Department at Washington the government specifications for all this juvenile service, and then assist the schools to give it a balanced relation to the general class work.

IV. Improve Street Morals.

The street-and-alley morals of the young are likewise often very disturbing, to say the least. There is a cheap loafing center for juveniles in practically every community, where public morals are not actively guarded. The small towns and villages are conspicuous in this respect. Often there is a café, restaurant or other public place where there is conducted daily and nightly a sort of school of deviltry. Even country boys attend here in considerable numbers.

1. Make a quiet canvass of your community and secure a list of the places where boys loaf. Usually they will be found at dirty tobacco stores and cafés.

2. Exert pressure, both public and private, to have these closed to boys under eighteen, except as strictly business calls may demand. Publicity is a most helpful agency here.

3. In a back alley somewhere you will probably find a boy gang congregated evenings after school. They may come here partly to play ball and partly to participate in coarse conduct. A merchant on whose back lot such a crowd assembled daily came out with a big bag of popcorn and agreed with the boys that they were to have the lot free so long as they cut out cigarettes, swearing, and other tough conduct. Try this scheme in your town.

4. Seek to substitute clean, helpful street-and-alley conditions for the boys. They must have a large amount of leisure-time activity. Institute play centers at the Y. M. C. A. or on church lawns, in city parks, on school grounds and elsewhere. Request some one to volunteer as patron of each such place. A near-by resident can do it at cost of little time and no money.

V. Obtain Better Movies.

As reported by the censors, the motion-picture films were never so much interspersed with salacious situations. It is practically impossible to keep back all this coarse stuff. Fights, holdups, homicide, theft, drinking, family disruptions and wrongs against sex—these and other inhumanities like them are so frequent in the scenes as to give the entire motion-picture business a sort of swaggering, sensual, dare-devil tone. And our boys and girls are there to see it all.

1. Write to the child-welfare department for a definite plan for securing the selected motion-picture service for juveniles.

2. Report frequently to your local exhibitor your observations on his films—what ones seem best and what seem bad for the young. Help him raise his standard, as he most probably is anxious to do his part.

3. In case of an exhibitor who wantonly displays coarse and depraving films—there are a few men of this class—make complaint of aim to the authorities and to the public, and start him on the way to reform.

4. The country has been secretly overrun with cheap vaudeville at the theaters, in tents and in the form of so-called street carnivals. The last named often sell dirty refreshments, conduct little near-gambling devices, and put on repulsive and depraving side shows, as games of graft and evil influence. Seek to deny these allies of the cabaret admission to your community. Unfortunately, some of our county fairs have been taken over by the questionable carnival companies.

VI. Help the Church Extension.

The many stars on the service flag at the churches will give a direct clue to the fact that these institutions and the Sunday schools have materially slackened if not entirely abandoned their child-welfare efforts. The loss here to the boy-scout service alone is very marked as well as very troublesome.

1. You will find the scouting movement one of the greatest of constructive outlets for pent-up boy energy. Strive to keep this work going in every church group.

2. Do not permit one local church to attempt to draw the boys of other denominations under its banner. Make the organization nonsectarian and general, with each church as a sort of mobilizing center.

3. There is beginning a very promising movement in the Sunday school, namely, to have in each case a child-study class—usually parents and others specially interested in the young. Encourage this idea whenever possible. The members of such a class soon become able teachers and leaders.

4. Assist the Sunday school to conduct regular parties, picnics and social affairs at the church, suited to provide wholesome entertainment for the children and older ones. Try to work out a coöperative plan for all the churches of your community.

5. Arrange with the churches to have formed an interdenominational social union to include the members of all the young people's societies and their friends. In case the local school does not conduct a weekly social affair for the young, urge this church union to take up the idea.

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VII. Support the Local Government.

The municipal governments have given up a large amount of their former efforts to safeguard the young in their respective communities. Statute laws and city ordinances relating to certain minor offenses and to certain forms of juvenile delinquency have lost much of the quickened conscience and the united public sentiment so necessary to back up their enforcement. As a consequence they are often flagrantly ignored.

1. Ask your city authorities to announce a more determined purpose to enforce its child-conservation ordinances, some of which have probably been forgotten.

2. You may be assured that your city government will go little beyond public demand in regard to this matter. Then seek to arouse public sentiment through the press, at churches, commercial clubs, teachers' conventions, club meetings, and other public assemblies.

3. Go to your mayor and council with a definite program for better law enforcement, better street-and-alley safeguards, better public amusement places, and the like. You will be welcomed.

VIII. Combat the Cigarette.

Tobacco is now accepted in the government's greatest organization as a necessary evil. But as played up by a shrewd system of advertising, the boys and youths at home have been led to look upon it as a necessary good. Hence vast numbers of our school boys—many of them as low as the fourth grade—have acquired the tobacco habit through the use of the cigarette. The evidence shows that this is the most alarming juvenile evil with which we have to contend. Indeed, we are even seriously threatened with the girl cigarette smoker. As touching these young of unformed characters, there is no reason to question the fact that the cigarette is now the chief contributor to juvenile delinquency and depravity.

1. The best sort of effort for combating the cigarette evil among the boys is the coöperative. A central committee constituted of one from the school authorities, the city government, the union of the churches, the federation of clubs, and perhaps another strong local element or two, these can do most to keep juveniles from becoming victims of tobacco.

2. Give conspicuous publicity by press notices, posters, and otherwise to the very radical anticigarette law and the ordinance related thereto. Appeal to all good citizens to assist with enforcement. Arouse the public by giving local and general facts as to the damage tobacco is doing to their growing boys.

3. Try to have a series of instructive anti-tobacco lessons presented to all the pupils of the public schools. Children cannot be expected to learn these facts by mere hearsay or absorption methods.

4. There is a tremendous moral struggle coming, to determine whether the tobacco business or the natural guardian shall control the

conduct of our growing boys. Kansas is looked to by many to lead in this campaign. If we fail to meet this challenge, then in another decade our young girls will be furnishing an army of victims for the nicotine monster. Write to the child-welfare department for valuable helps on the juvenile nicotine problem.

The Department of Child Welfare will suggest helps, references and detailed plans of guidance for any of this work, upon receipt of request for the same. Also a program for conducting a local child-welfare rally may be had for the asking.

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